

work. It has been assumed, and repeated *ad nauseam*, by some critics, that he was a very ignorant man with little or no real experience of life, one who, aided by a little imagination, concocted his books out of others,, basing his narratives entirely on printed documents. But that assumption is fallacious. It was helped on, certainly, by some of Zola's friends, notably by Paul Alexis, who in his account of the earlier Rougon-Macquart volumes expatiated at length on some of the novelist's sources of information.¹ This Alexis did with Zola's sanction, in a spirit of literary honesty, but his insistence on the subject perverted the judgment of several critics, in such wise that Zola has been largely described as a writer who acquired his information merely by cramming. That such a view of the man and his work is erroneous may be easily shown.

He certainly had to study certain subjects in books, and rely, occasionally, on information given him by friends, but few writers ever put more actual experience and personal knowledge into their works. Even his original acquaintance with "society" was more considerable than some have admitted. In Michelet's drawing-room, which was the first he frequented, he met, it is true, only serious men, while Flaubert's was but a superlative Bohemia; but in Madame Meurice's *salon*, to which, whatever his poverty, he had his *entree* during the last years of the

Empire, he
found not only republicanism and literary
culture, but many
of the graces of life, a high standard of comfort
if not lux-
ury, charming women who added a touch of
pleasant frivol-

* The writer must plead guilty to having unintentionally
assisted the
growth of the legend "by insisting often unduly on some of
Zola's "quellen,"
in his introductions to the English translations of the
novelist's books.